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Priest praises squatters co-op

A CATHOLIC priest has branded Camden Council immoral for trying to evict 20 homeless people from a building that has lain empty for over a year.

The building in Leighton Road, Kentish Town, was occupied last Monday by a group of young homeless people who want to turn it into a housing resource centre.

On Thursday, a High Court judge refused to grant Camden Council an eviction notice until he had heard the proposals for the building from the new occupiers.

He granted them legal aid and adjourned the hearing until tomorrow (Friday).

According to the occupiers, every council in England is obliged to provide protection and advice for the homeless and unemployed by 1995 under an international treaty.

Under proposals they will submit to the High Court tomorrow, the group intend to turn the building into a "Community Housing Action Zone" and provide creche and playground facilities for chil-

dren whose parents have to work; a community centre and housing co-op.

They also intend to set up a soup kitchen in a disused church on Highgate Road, Kentish Town, which they have occupied with permission from the Church of England for the last year.

Father Pat Brown, of the Church of Our Lady Help of the Christians, in Lady Margaret Road, Kentish Town, said that until they have made up their minds what to

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Praise for squat

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do with the building the council should allow the occupiers to stay.

"I think it's immoral to have empty buildings, especially when they are owned by the council," he said. "The building has been lying empty for years so the council should be talking to the people now inside it about what they want to do with it."

Christine Peters, 27, a spokeswoman for the group, who are being followed by a BBC documentary camera team, said: "We haven't asked the council for any money and we've been assured that everything we want to do is what Camden intends to do under the treaty. We are offering to do it for them for nothing."

She also said that the group had been seeking a meeting with council chief Jeremy Smith but

had been unable to. Instead they met a Camden press officer, last week who refused to answer any questions on camera. They were telephoned later and told that the eviction would still be going ahead.

According to another group member, Peter Barry, 23, the building, part of which is listed, used to be a soup kitchen run by the old St Pancras Parish. It was bequeathed to the GLC and then passed into Camden's control. They are studying the title deeds to see if any conditions were made when the building was given to the GLC.

A spokesman for Camden Council said: "The social services area officer is currently looking at alternative uses of the building. We will be seeking repossession on Friday because the building is being illegally occupied."